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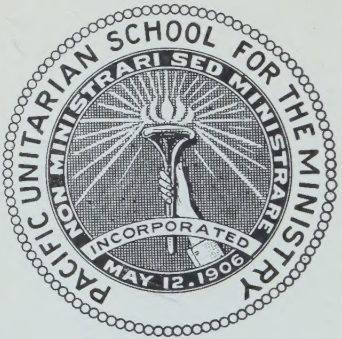

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THE ECCLESIASTICAL

POLITY OF METHODISM

Defended:

A REFUTATION OF CERTAIN OBJECTIONS TO THE SYSTEM OF ITINERANCY

IN

THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

BY F HODGSON, D.D.

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.—EPHESIANS iv, 16.

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PREFACE.

THE contents of this little volume were first published in a series of numbers in a weekly religious periodical.

They are offered to the public in this form, in compliance with a request of the Philadelphia Annual Conference, held in April, 1847. The author deemed the thoughts here recorded of some importance, or he would not have employed his time in writing them; but he was greatly surprised by the reading and passage of the following resolution:—

"Resolved, That brother Francis Hodgson be respectfully requested to prepare for publication, in book form, certain articles which recently appeared from his pen, under the title of THE ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY OF METHODISM DEFENDED, and that we recommend them to the publishers in New-York, to be issued in cheap style, for general circulation."

This estimation was favorable beyond his most sanguine hopes.

Some may be ready to ask, Why write and publish another book, at this time, in defense of the economy of Methodism? Have we not within a few months been favored with the works of Stevens and Porter on the same subject? It is due, perhaps, to the Philadelphia Conference to say, that, when the above resolution was passed, these excellent works were not yet published; whereas the articles which it recommends to be published had been issued for more than a year, the first appearing on the 27th of December, 1845.

At this time a great many minds, of various degrees of cultivation and power, are engaged in the investigation of social institutions, political and ecclesiastical. This may be productive of much good. For, although forms of government may not be of primary importance, they may greatly promote or obstruct the happiness of society. A well-constituted ecclesiastical government is a mighty engine by which the moral power of the church is advantageously and effectively applied, and even augmented. All this inquiry, this agitation, this shaking of systems, may be prelusive to that more perfect state of society in which those things only will remain which cannot be shaken.

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THE

POLITY OF METHODISM DEFENDED.

CHAPTER I.

Opposition to Methodism—Object of the author—Itinerancy objected to—Comparison instituted—Difficulties attendant upon the election of pastors by churches or congregations.

The ecclesiastical polity of Methodism is frequently assailed by both ministers and laymen of the several leading religious denominations. It is represented as degrading to our membership in general, and our ministry in particular, requiring of them a very servile submission to authority; as dangerous to the civil institutions of the country; and as anti-republican, aristocratical, despotic, and unscriptural. These representations are made in conversation, tracts, pamphlets, periodicals, and in books, some of which are written for the purpose, mainly, of recommending the polity of the respect-

ive denominations to which the writers belong; others for the professed purpose of enlightening the public in respect to the evils and absurdities of Methodism.

Now if we believe that our system of church government is Scriptural and rational; and if we prefer it because we conceive it to be better adapted than any other to the great purpose for which Christ established his church upon earth; can we, by our silence, suffer it to become the object of suspicion and dislike, without serious neglect of duty toward God and our fellow-beings?

I do not call in question the right of any to examine our system, or to condemn it, publicly or privately, if, in their judgment, it deserve such condemnation. I claim only, that we, who view it in a different light, may be under a solemn obligation to defend it. I, for one, shall endeavor so to do.

I shall take up, first, the manner in which our system distributes ministerial labor, or, in other words, our itinerant ministry.

The grand central arrangement in the economy of Methodism—that which exerts a modifying influence on all the other parts of the system—is its itinerating missionary ministry.

As it is not my object to eulogize, but merely to defend, I shall proceed at once to an examination of the objections which are urged against it.

The most frequent, and perhaps the most popular, objection is, that it does not allow the churches to choose their own pastors; and that, when they are accidentally or providentially suited, they are not allowed to retain the object of their preference.

That our usages, in this respect, are different from those of many other denominations is admitted. Were our ministers and churches allowed to enter into mutual contracts, as theirs do, our itinerancy could not exist. This, I think, must be obvious to any one who will give the subject a moment's consideration. We should fall, inevitably, into the plan of a settled ministry. Nor is it wonderful that particular

churches among us should sometimes be subject to the pastoral charge of ministers who do not suit them in every particular. This difficulty is peculiar to no system. Our brethren who object, need not be astonished to find, that we have diligently inquired how far we should be likely to avoid it, by adopting their plan. I purpose to institute a comparison between our system and that by which particular churches elect their pastors, and settle them for life, or for a long or an indefinite period.

Can those churches always procure the ministers whom they prefer above all others? Whatsoever diversities of character and condition may characterize churches, they are all alike in some respects; they all desire the services of those whom they deem able ministers. Suppose, then, that a church is without a pastor. The leading men begin to consult with each other. A meeting must be called. An election must take place. The Rev. John Angell James, a very popular and useful Independent minister of

Birmingham, in England, in a work entitled "THE CHURCH MEMBER'S GUIDE," which has been republished in this country under the editorial supervision of the Rev. J. O. Choules, an eminent Baptist minister, and with an Introduction by the Rev. Hubbard Winslow, "pastor of the Bowdoin-street Church, Boston," recommends, that "a committee, composed of the deacons, or of the deacons and a few of the most judicious members, should be appointed to procure supplies, and look out for candidates." Page 168.

And now the church's difficulties commence. They must select a minister and determine upon the amount of salary to be offered, and it is by no means certain that the electors will at once agree in reference to either. If the pastorate be a desirable one, it is likely that a number of candidates will display their capabilities before them, and each secure ardent supporters. But it is important, if not indispensable, that the election should be nearly, if not quite, unanimous. The reasons are obvious. No judicious minister will con-

sent to place himself in the relations contemplated, when a considerable number were in the minority at his election. His happiness and usefulness would be greatly hazarded by the step. This is also a matter in which the peace of the church is deeply involved. Mr. James, in his remarks on the election of a pastor, says, "It would be well for every church to have a standing rule, that no pastor should be chosen but by two-thirds, or three-fourths, of the members present." The form of government of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America, provides, that "when the votes are taken, if it appear that a large majority of the people are averse from the candidate who has a majority of votes, and cannot be induced to concur in the call, the presiding minister shall endeavor to dissuade the congregation from prosecuting it further."

The difficulties of election are often increased by the existence of parties in the church, dividing on questions of theology or reform. There are old school and new

school. There are abolitionists and colonizationists. There are high church and low church. Each party is bent upon securing such a man as they may deem to be of the right stamp. The majority of electors often consists of inexperienced young men. These may urge their choice against the older and more judicious members. Mr. James finds it necessary to give the following caution: "Especial deference should be paid by the younger and inexperienced members of the church to the opinions of their senior and more experienced brethren. The sentiments of the deacons, and those individuals who have grown gray in the service of the Lord and the church, should be received with great attention, and have great weight. A youth of seventeen is a very incompetent judge of ministerial qualifications, compared with a venerable father of seventy. That haughty spirit which leads a young person, or a novice, to say, 'I have a vote as well as the oldest and richest, and have as much right to be heard and consulted as they,' is not the spirit of

the gospel, but of turbulence and faction. How much more amiable and lovely is such a declaration as the following: 'I, young and inexperienced, am a very inadequate judge of the suitableness of a minister for this situation, and therefore should be pretty much guided in my opinion by the opinion of others, older and wiser than myself.'" Page 170.

Sometimes men of wealth and influence set themselves against the wishes of the people. Mr. James remarks, that "there are in many churches individuals whose circumstances must necessarily give peculiar weight to their opinions." He cautions such persons against assuming "the office of dictators." He also says: "Democracies are as liable to the control of a few leading individuals, probably more so, than any other system; but then these individuals should act, by causing the people to act for them." He pronounces an attempt to exert their influence, in opposition to the wishes of the people, "a most irrational, unscriptural assumption of power." Page 172.

These are some of the difficulties in the way of a unanimous or satisfactory election.

CHAPTER II.

Difficulties subsequent to election—Calls may be rejected—A minister when settled may not suit—A church may be able to retain a favorite minister but a short time.

In the preceding chapter a comparison is instituted between the manner of supplying churches with pastors and teachers, observed by the M. E. Church, and the plan of particular churches electing their pastors; and some of the difficulties which stand in the way of a satisfactory election are brought into view.

Let us now suppose the election to have taken place with a good degree of harmony. Suppose the choice to be even unanimous. A call is made out, and, in due form, sent to the person elected. Does he come? He may, or may not. Perhaps he has been a candidate, but he cannot accept the offered salary, and so rejects the

call. Perhaps none of the candidates have secured the choice of the electors. An able minister is called from some other church, but he declines the overture. There may be a long succession of these repulses. Churches are often obliged to moderate greatly their demands in reference to ministerial abilities. But no sooner do they come down to a lower grade of qualifications, than their unanimity ceases.

And when a minister has been obtained, is it certain that the church will be satisfied? May not these difficulties very soon recur? Congregations are not unfrequently captivated by a few dashing sermons, and find out, in a short time after the settlement, that their new minister is incompetent to the task he has assumed. A speedy dismission ensues. In some instances churches are imposed upon by injudicious and interested recommendations. Mr. James has the following passage on this subject: "Let ministers to whom applications are made by a destitute church, to recommend them a candidate, beware of suffering themselves to mention the

name of any individual, whom, in their conscientious opinion, they do not think to be suitable. To recommend any person out of mere pity, because he is destitute of a situation; or out of natural affection or friendship, because he happens to be a relative or acquaintance; without regard to his character, general qualifications, or suitableness for the situation in question, is a most criminal act, and deserves the severest reprobation: it is an act of the most guilty treachery toward, not an individual, but a community; not in reference to temporal interests, but to spiritual and eternal ones. In some cases unsuitable recommendations are given from a love of patronage; in others, from an excess of good nature: but from whatever cause they proceed, the mischief they do is incalculable." Page 168.

Whatever may be the causes, certain it is, that, in many instances, ministers are scarcely settled before the subject of their dismission is agitated.

But let us try a more favorable supposition in regard to the capabilities of the

new incumbent. The church has succeeded in obtaining a young man of very superior qualifications; are they sure of retaining him? It frequently happens that after a church has been destitute for a long time, and has gone to great expense of pains and money to secure the pastoral services of some favorite, he is settled but a short time before a call comes from some other church. He accepts it; and while there may be joy on the one hand, there are mortification and heart-burnings on the other. The deserved encomiums which were bestowed upon him, for the purpose of increasing his popularity and usefulness, among those who, it was supposed, would be long favored with his ministrations, were the means of attracting toward him the attention of some richer and more influential congregation, and have resulted in his removal.

Large and wealthy city congregations have very great advantages over others, on the electing plan, as they can call and secure the ablest men, from all parts of the land, and retain them as long as it may

seem desirable; inasmuch as they cannot be called away to places offering either a better support or wider fields of usefulness.

The foregoing argument has proceeded upon the supposition that the prerogative of choosing and settling pastors is in the hands of a majority of the whole membership of the churches respectively. What if it should appear, on inquiry, that this is not the case? It must be kept in mind that most, if not all, of the churches which elect their pastors, exclude females from the privilege of voting; and yet, in many cases, this sex constitutes a majority, or two-thirds, of the church. It also often occurs, that the female portion of the church embodies the greater amount of piety, intelligence, wealth, and influence; so that the pastor, after all, may be elected by the smaller part of the church, and that part, it may be, the least competent to judge of his qualifications.

CHAPTER III.

Further difficulties—Elections liable to be annulled—Authorities.

HAVING thus adverted to some of the difficulties which embarrass those churches which elect their pastors, in relation to both *choosing* and *retaining*, I further remark, that, in New-England Congregationalism, there is a power outside of the church by which the election of the church may be wholly defeated.

The Rev. E. R. Tyler of New-Haven, Connecticut, in a work recently published, entitled, "Congregational Catechism," asks the question, "In what manner are men raised to the office of pastor in Congregational churches?" He answers, "By the free election of the brethren, and a solemn induction into office." He then goes on to describe the process as follows: "The brethren of the church, having first fixed their eyes upon a candidate for the pastoral office over them, and sought the divine guidance in a matter of so great import-

ance, by fasting and prayer, make the election; and *if the ecclesiastical society concur* in their choice, and the pastor elect accepts the appointment, a council of neighboring churches is called, by whose aid he is ordained, or solemnly inducted into office."

The Rev. Dr. Hawes, of Hartford, Connecticut, in his "Tribute to the Memory of the Pilgrims," remarking on the principles of the Congregational churches of New-England, says: "There is another feature in our ecclesiastical polity which I must not pass unnoticed. It relates to the manner in which the independence and purity of the churches are secured, in consistency with the rights and privileges of the congregation. These two bodies are in some respects united and one, but in others are distinct independent corporations. In the call and settlement of a minister, which is the great business they have to transact together, each exerts a separate and uncontrolled agency. And yet the concurrence of each is indispensable to the validity of their respective acts.

The church has no power to place a minister over the congregation, nor has the congregation any power to place a minister over the church. In effecting the settlement of a pastor, the concurrent voice of the church and society is essential." Page 58.

Here, then, is a corporation distinct from the church, and capable of exerting a separate agency, without the concurrence of which the church cannot elect and settle a pastor, no matter if unanimous in its choice. The church, we are told, has no power to place a pastor over the congregation, and, of consequence, it has no power to place a pastor over itself. If the ecclesiastical society cannot place a pastor over the church, it can withhold its concurrence, and so compel the church to elect whom it chooses, or go without a pastor. And this is the boasted "free election of the brethren!" And, mark! this power of defeating the church is in the hands of irreligious men. They do not belong to the church. The members of the church and the members of this corporation act

separately in this matter. No particular moral qualifications are requisite to entitle any one to membership in this society, except, perhaps, a willingness to support public worship. They may make those high spiritual qualifications which engage the preference of the church, the very reason for refusing their concurrence. And, still further, this society, distinct from the church, owns all the church property; determines what amount of salary shall be offered to the candidate on condition of his accepting the call; and is the party responsible in law for the raising and the payment of the salary: (see Dr. Baird's Religion in America, vol. ii, page 227:) so that the church sustains a very subordinate and dependent part in this important business.

It would seem to have been, if it is not now, a disputed question among our Congregational brethren, whether the church should have precedence of the society, in the election of a pastor, or the society the precedence of the church. Professor Upham, in his Ratio Disciplinæ, argues this

point, and thus concludes against allowing parishes, or ecclesiastical societies, the precedence: "The evil consequences alluded to undoubtedly are, the introduction, in a short time, of a corrupt ministry; the subsequent corruption of the churches; and, in this way, the ultimate ruin of both. That such consequences would follow is obvious, when we remember the depravity of the human heart, and when we take into the account that multitudes are fond of having moral teachers, whose practice at least is as wanting in strictness and purity as their own."

But, if it would be so dangerous for the society to take the lead in the settlement of a pastor, can it be safe for them to have the power that is accorded to them?

Whatever disadvantages the Methodist churches may be subject to, they are not liable to having their pastors chosen and forced upon them by *irreligious men*—men who are not even church members.

Nor is this the only restriction to which Congregational churches are subject in the selection of their pastors. The Rev.

Dr. Bacon, of New-Haven, in his Church Manual, says, that "a church, after having elected its pastor, is ordinarily bound to call on the neighboring churches to come together, by their pastors and messengers, that they may advise and assist in his solemn inauguration:" when "the council thus convened looks into the preliminary proceedings, to be informed respecting the regularity and harmony of the election, and the terms on which the office has been offered by the church, and accepted by the candidate;" and "proceeds to examine the person set before them as the pastor elect, that they may be satisfied respecting his knowledge, his ability for the work, and his piety," and "pass, and put on record, their solemn judgment respecting his fitness for the office to which the church has called him; *and, if they find him fit*, set him apart to the responsibilities and labors of that office, by prayer and the laying on of hands." We are told that "all this is not because a church has not a right to choose its officers, or even in particular cases to induct them into office; but because a

church is bound, by the law of Christian love, to ask the advice and aid of sister churches in matters of great and common interest." He adds: "So in regard to the dismission of a pastor from his official relation to the church. A pastor has a right to resign his office, and the church has power to accept his resignation; and the parties may declare the relation dissolved, and it is dissolved; without any consultation of the neighboring churches at all. Nor do we call in question the power of the church to do all this, when we say that it ought to have called in other churches to advise and aid in such a transaction. The thing may be done, and done effectually, and nothing wanting to its validity, when yet it is not done properly, or with decorum. A thing may be done which is not done decently and in order; and a decent respect for the feelings and interests of sister churches, a moderate share of the spirit of Christian courtesy, will constrain any church, of moderate intelligence, to do such a thing decently and in order, by calling a council of the sister churches,

when the preliminaries have been arranged, and saying to them, thus we have done, and thus we propose to do, and now we ask your judgment and approval." Page 138.

Now although our Congregational brethren assert, in theory, the right of the churches to choose, ordain, and dismiss, their pastors; and that the interference of councils is merely advisory; it is practically a serious thing with them not to take advice. The churches that decline it, not only subject themselves to being considered as destitute of a decent respect for the feelings and interests of sister churches, and "a moderate share of intelligence;" but also expose themselves to the disadvantage of an exclusion from ecclesiastical fellowship with sister churches. And as to the abstract right to act disorderly and indecently, and "to violate the great principle of the communion of the churches," what is it worth? Does any ecclesiastical system deserve praise for conceding such a right?

The Presbyterian Church likewise imposes restraints on the power of particular

churches to choose and settle their pastors. The constitution requires that, when an election has taken place, and a call been drawn up in due form, "the call, thus prepared, shall be presented to the presbytery under whose care the person called shall be; that, if the presbytery think it expedient to present the call to him, it may be accordingly presented: and no minister or candidate shall receive a call but through the hands of the presbytery." Page 337.

And if I am not mistaken, the Presbyterian mode extends the right of suffrage, beyond the members of the church, to those who belong merely to the congregation. If this is the case, the congregation may unite with a minority of the church to call an unsuitable minister; or, at least, to defeat the choice of a majority of the church.

CHAPTER IV.

Manner of entering the ministry, and of appointment to pastoral charge, in the M. E. Church: in the Congregational and Presbyterian churches—The difference estimated.

In the foregoing chapter the attention of the reader is directed to certain constitutional restrictions, to which Congregational and Presbyterian churches are subject, in the election and settlement of pastors.

It is not difficult to imagine a good reason for these checks and restraints. Were individual ministers and particular churches at liberty to make and dissolve contracts for pastoral labor and support, without any supervision and interference, there would be no security against the wildest speculation and disorder. A writer in the New-England Puritan, a very ably conducted paper, published in Boston, by the Congregationalists, attributes some changes to "movements" on the part of churches, "having for their object the removal of ministers for slight and insufficient reasons." (See No. for August 19, 1841.) Another

writer in the same paper, in a series of eloquent articles on "Ex-pastors," attributes changes to "the love of distinction and emolument" on the part of ministers, prompting them to seek "some more elevated and lucrative post;" and adds, "The dismission of pastors from this cause, with various disappointments as to obtaining more eligible fields, has unquestionably diminished the popular veneration for the ministerial office, and weakened the impression of the sanctity of the pastoral relation." (See No. for July 17, 1841.) All this occurs notwithstanding the obstacles interposed by councils and presbyteries.

Where then is the great difference between the privilege of these churches and ours in respect to the choice of pastors? It will not do to say that our churches have *no voice* in the choice of their pastors. In the first place, no man can reach the pastoral office, in our church, without passing several times under the review of the laity. He must first be licensed to exhort. This cannot be "without the consent of the leaders' meeting, or of the class of which

he is a member, where no leaders meeting is held." *Dis.*, p. 48. He must then obtain license to preach as a local preacher; but, in order to this, he must again be recommended by the society of which he is a member, or by a leaders' meeting. Nor is that recommendation sufficient to procure him a license. It barely brings him before the quarterly meeting conference, which consists of laymen, with the exception of the presiding elder, and preacher or preachers of the circuit or station; so that there are generally but two, and rarely more than three, ministers present, and one of these the presiding officer, who seldom votes on any question at issue. Next he must be received into the regular itinerancy. But this cannot be without the recommendation of the quarterly conference. And if, with us, particular churches cannot select their immediate pastors, nor pastors their churches; yet the churches may represent their peculiar circumstances, and petition for the minister by whom they think they would be well suited. And, as a general thing, those who choose to petition are gratified.

That this is not always so, is a matter of absolute necessity; as no man can be the pastor of more than one circuit or station at the same time, and applicants for the services of one person may be numerous, or, at least, there may be a plurality of them. In other instances, the application fails from considerations of expediency; such, perhaps, as would induce a council or a presbytery to refuse their concurrence with an election, or a minister to reject the call.

It is evident from these statements, that the electing system, as observed by the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, has very little, if any, advantage over ours in reference to the liberty of choosing pastors. Indeed the privilege of election, which is accorded to their churches, is necessary to raise them to a level with ours. For while, with us, the pastoral office is reached by successive steps, each of which is watched over by the laity, and must be sanctioned by their formally expressed will; with them the laity is not consulted at all, until the question comes up, which of the many

ministers, who have been made such independently of them, shall be their immediate pastor.

A young man determines on the ministry as his vocation. He is supported by his parents or his guardians, or by an education society, while he seeks the education required. He is then licensed by an association of ministers, if a Congregationalist, or, if a Presbyterian, by the presbytery, which consists chiefly of ministers, being composed "of all the ministers; and one ruling elder from each congregation, within a certain district," *Con.*, page 357; and the particular churches must select their pastors from the number of those so introduced into the ministry. Deny these churches the privilege of election, and they would be in a pitiably helpless and degraded condition—a condition vastly inferior to that of our churches. The laity with us have spoken four times, before the laity with them have spoken once. And if our people see proper to do so, they can speak a fifth time, but not authoritatively; they can speak by petition. They have

raised a class of men to the pastoral office, with the understanding that particular churches will not elect their immediate pastors, nor pastors their churches; but that ministerial labor will be distributed by a distinct, well-defined, and responsible authority, created for the purpose.

The advocates of the electing system bring into contrast and magnify the extreme points of their system and ours, overlooking all the intervening facts which go to equalize them. Because our churches do not elect their ministers, they are represented as having *no voice* in the matter—as being perfectly passive and powerless. Because theirs do elect their ministers, they would have us think that their choice is wholly unembarrassed, and that they are invariably in possession of the services of the man whom they prefer above all others. Neither of these representations is correct.

This then is the result of the foregoing investigation: No man can attain to the pastoral relation, or even the ministry, in our church, without the consent of the lay members of particular churches, frequently

expressed. But the churches cannot select their immediate pastors; the pastors are appointed to their particular fields of labor by the bishops, who have been raised to the office of a general superintendency, for the purpose of a judicious distribution of pastoral labor. They may be regarded as the embodied wisdom and authority of the entire denomination in reference to this business. They are responsible for every official act. But while the churches cannot select their pastors, they may petition the appointing power for particular ministers; and we have only to suppose the bishops and their advisors to be as disinterested as councils and presbyteries are, to authorize the expectation that the petition will be granted whenever it is judged expedient. And, in point of fact, it is a common thing for petitions to be granted. On the other hand, the Congregational churches have nothing to say in the promotion of their members to the ministerial office. They are not officially consulted either as to the gifts, graces, or orthodoxy, of those who apply for admission into the

ministry. The Presbyterian churches have very little official influence in this important transaction. In that denomination ministers are made solely by the presbyteries, which are always likely to comprise a majority of ministers, and in which the laity are represented only by a ruling elder from each particular church. For this privation of official influence in authorizing men to minister at the altar, they are compensated by the right of electing their pastors. But this privilege is subject to various embarrassments; so that, instead of being able to secure in all cases the men preferred, they are often, like the Methodists, obliged to put up with the best they can obtain. The female portion of the church, which often constitutes a large majority, including the largest share of intelligence and piety, is excluded from the privilege of voting; thus the election frequently devolves on a minority of the members. This minority may be far from unanimous, and the prosecution of a call inexpedient, notwithstanding there has been an election. Should the electors be unani-

mous, their choice may be neutralized in various ways—among the Congregationalists by a vote of the ecclesiastical society, and by the council, should the church and the ecclesiastical society concur; and among the Presbyterians by a vote of the presbytery. Should the church electing be sole applicant for the services of the minister elect, he may consider the place ineligible, or the salary inadequate, and so decline the call. Is the call accepted; the election approved; the pastor installed; the church delighted by his zeal, learning, and eloquence? He may receive and accept another call in the course of a few months, procure a dismission, and leave his recent flock as destitute as he found them. And, besides all this, should the minister become wholly unpopular with the church and congregation, he may legally retain his place for many weary and profitless years. I have no doubt that there are twenty churches, among those which observe the electing system, dissatisfied with their ministers, to one in our denomination.

CHAPTER V.

Superiority of Methodism—Pastors obtained without loss of time.

I now proceed to show that, in many respects, our system of distributing ministerial labor is manifestly and vastly superior to that with which it is compared.

In the first place, it supplies our churches with pastors so promptly as to prevent the long seasons of destitution to which those are liable which elect their pastors. It is not uncommon for churches, on the latter system, to be for many months, and even years, without a pastor, through the difficulty of electing one, or of effecting a settlement. Should there be no more delay than is inevitably incident to the workings of the system, still the duration of the vacancy must be considerable. Mr. James observes: "Great care should be taken, by those to whom the church has delegated the power of procuring candidates, *not to invite upon probation any individual of whose suitableness they have not receiv-*

ed previous and satisfactory testimony." Page 169. And when, after cautious inquiry, a candidate has been invited, "great caution ought to be exercised in forming a judgment upon the suitableness of an individual. That a proper opportunity might be afforded to the church for coming to this opinion, the probationary term of a candidate should not be *too short.* Preaching is not the only thing to be judged of; piety, prudence, diligence, general deportment, are all to be taken into the account: and for a trial in all these points, a period of *three months* cannot be thought too long." Page 170. The Rev. Mr. Punchard, author of the work in favor of Congregationalism, published in the year 1844, complains that the "churches are not all as particular upon this point as they ought to be; certainly far less than our fathers were. It was once thought necessary for a candidate for settlement to spend *months* among the people of his prospective charge; but now some churches are satisfied with an acquaintance of a few days only, and some are ready to call a

pastor without having had any personal acquaintance with him." He adds: "This undoubtedly is one reason why there is now so little permanency in the pastoral relation. Are we not verifying the maxim, 'To innovate is not to improve?'" P. 164.

This is evidently sound doctrine. Less caution than is here prescribed, would be reckless haste when a minister is to be chosen from among many, and settled for life, or for a long or an indefinite period, by a vote of the members of the church, or of the church and congregation. Now we have only to suppose—what is indeed a very common case—that a succession of candidates should be unsuccessful, and the result is a long interruption of the pastoral succession. During this time the churches may have the gospel preached to them by the candidates; but these do not sustain the pastoral relation, and of course there are many important pastoral duties which they cannot perform. Think also of the circumstances under which they preach and the people hear. The one tempted to seek the gratification of his hearers rather

than their profit; the others, criticizing and estimating the performance of the preacher, rather than receiving with meekness the ingrafted word. With us no time is lost. The church is immediately supplied in case of the death of a pastor. And changes are so effected that the very hour which removes a pastor supplies his place with another, who enters at once upon the labors of his predecessors, to govern, and be governed, by precisely the same rules, and to observe the same pre-established usages.

CHAPTER VI.

Our system avoids dangerous excitements—Liabilities of the opposite plan.

Our system avoids the unhallowed excitements and pernicious agitations to which those churches are liable which elect their pastors. Mr. James makes the following significant remarks: "When a Christian minister is removed, either to his eternal rest or to some other sphere of labor in

the present world, the choice of a successor always brings on a crisis in the history of the church of which he was the pastor. No event that could happen can place the interest of the society in greater peril. Distraction and division have so frequently resulted from this circumstance, so many churches have been rent by it, that an argument has been founded upon it, if not against the right of popular election to the pastoral office, yet against the expediency of using it. It must be admitted that, on these occasions, our principles as Independents, and our practice as Christians, have not unfrequently been brought into disrepute. We have been accused of wrangling about a *teacher* of religion till we have lost all our religion in the affray; and the state of many congregations proves that the charge is not altogether without foundation." Page 165.

As might be expected, Mr. James thinks that these things form no solid objection against his system; but it cannot be denied that he unveils a startling scene.

He gives directions for the conduct of

church members, during the progress of the election, which opens to our view the workings of the plan: "Let all the members, as soon as their pastor is removed or dead, *seriously reflect on the crisis into which the church is brought*, the great importance of preserving its peace, and the influence which individual conduct may have upon the future prosperity of the society. Let them deliberately reflect thus: 'The church is now coming into circumstances of peril, and I, as an individual, may be accessory, according as my conduct shall be, to its injury or prosperity. God forbid our harmony should be disturbed, or our Zion become otherwise than a quiet habitation. So far as depends upon myself, I will sacrifice everything but principle, rather than have those scenes of division and distraction among us which are common in the religious world.'" Page 166.

What principle it is that Mr. James would not have sacrificed, to avoid "those scenes of division and distraction," we are not informed. Certain it is he comes very

near recommending a surrender of the right of choice. "It would be very advisable," he says, "in some cases, for even so large a majority as two-thirds, or even three-fourths, *to give up the point*, rather than carry it in opposition to a minority which includes in it the deacons and many of the most experienced and respectable members of society. The majority in such instances have the *right* to decide; but it is a question whether they ought not, for the sake of peace, to waive the exercise of it." Page 172. And the young are cautioned, in a style which partakes largely of the dictatorial, against the assertion of their rights.

He cautions against "*secret canvassing*, and attempts to influence the minds of others;" enforcing the caution by the following very expressive terms: "To see the mean and petty arts of a contested election carried into the church of God is dreadful." He gives as a reason for a certain rule, that it "would preclude much of that cabal and intrigue which are sometimes employ-

ed when the matter is carried on by a mere majority." Page 171.

Nor does the agitation cease when the minister has been elected by an ample majority. It is necessary that the majority "should exercise peculiar FORBEARANCE and AFFECTION toward those who are opposed to them, carefully avoiding to impute their objections to any improper motives; listening to their statements with patience; treating them with candor; reasoning with them in the spirit of love; and giving them time to have their difficulties removed. The happiest results have often been the issue of such kind and Christian conduct. If, however, instead of this, the dissentients are treated with harshness and intolerance; if their opposition be attributed to a factious and caviling temper; if they are regarded with contempt, as a despicable minority, of which no notice should be taken, and are left immediately to themselves, without any conciliatory measures being taken, while the majority proceeds immediately to decide; a schism is sure to take place,

as mischievous to the church as it is disgraceful to religion." Page 171.

His instructions to the minority are quite ominous: "When a minister is at length brought in by a large majority, it then becomes a question, *What ought to be the conduct of the minority?* Should they *separate* and form another religious society? Certainly not, except as a dernier resort. Let them consider the evils connected with such a state of things. What ill will is often produced between the two societies; how much antichristian feeling is excited; how it injures the spirit of both parties; what envies, and jealousies, and evil speakings, commence and continue, to the injury of religion and the triumph of its enemies!" Page 173.

He admits, that "in some cases a *division is necessary*," and exhorts, that where "it is unavoidable, great efforts should be made to effect it in *love*."

He thus refers to prevalent evils and their remedy: "We carry into the sanctuary and into the church our pride, our self-will, our personal taste. That spirit

of mutual submission, brotherly love, and surrender of our own gratification to the good of others, which the word of God enjoins, and our profession avows, would keep the church always happy and harmonious, and enable it to pass in safety through the most critical circumstances in which it can be placed. Instead of seeking the good of the whole, the feeling of too many of our members may be thus summarily expressed, 'I will have my way.'" Page 174.

Now these are evils which our system avoids. And the spirit which this able and amiable author recommends as their remedy—the spirit of mutual submission; the surrender of our own gratification to the good of others, preferring the greatest good to the gratification of a part—this is the very basis of our itinerancy. Ministers and churches agree to waive particular and personal advantages in order to accomplish more extensively and effectively the great ends for which the church and its ministry were ordained.

CHAPTER VII.

Frequent changes not peculiar to Methodism—Advantages of the itinerant system in respect to change—How to effect the removal of an unacceptable minister.

While the frequency of change is made an objection to our itinerant plan, it is found impossible to avoid it by any other. The extent to which it affects those churches which boast a settled ministry is feelingly deplored by recent writers. Mr. Punchard remarks: "The unsettled state of everything connected with the pastoral office, for a few years past, has, undoubtedly, introduced irregularities into the practice of our denomination upon this point, as well as upon many others. In most cases the pastoral connection is now formed with the understanding that it will be short-lived. A stipulation is often made that the connection may be dissolved by either party—the church or the pastor—giving the other three months' notice. In other cases a settlement is made for a stipulated number of years—*five* being a

favorite number. The system of rotation has been pretty thoroughly introduced into the pastoral office. Our pastors have become *traveling* preachers, *circuit riders*." Page 270. The writer on "Ex-pastors" remarks: "However it may be explained, the fact is most manifest, that the pastoral relation has, within a recent period, been exceedingly and extensively weakened." He contrasts the present with former times, when ministers were "settled for life," and adds: "Fluctuation and revolution, settlements and dismissions, in rapid succession, within a few years, have become the order of the day."—*N. E. Puritan, June* 12th, 1841. If we add to the frequent changes of pastors the almost innumerable changes of candidates and stated supplies, there will be a pretty fair presumption that, on the whole, changes take place as frequently with them as with us.

Now we regard it as a leading excellence of our system that it so provides for change, that it takes place regularly and without discord. Change is a part of our plan, and not an interruption of it. Other

systems contemplate a permanent union between particular churches and pastors, and the necessity for change is a disastrous contingency for which they must provide as well as they can.

With those churches that observe the elective system, it is, in many instances, nearly as difficult to get rid of a minister that is not acceptable as to secure one that is. Sometimes the unfortunate pastor takes a hint that a change is desired, and vacates his office without any further warning. Sometimes a mere suspicion on his part is sufficient to dislodge him. He is too sensitive. Sometimes direct proposals are waited for, and yielded to at once. However, it is not always convenient thus to fall in with the expressed wishes of the church. Great sacrifices are often involved in a removal. The minister is not willing to make them, and so holds his people to the contract. And now the system begins to develop new beauties. In some cases, when the pastor has been settled for life, according to the prevailing custom in those halcyon days, the departure of which is so

affectingly lamented by a writer in the New-England Puritan, the church buys off the incumbent from the pastoral relation, and the right to the pulpit, by what is deemed an adequate compensation.

The following, according to Mr. Punchard, is the order of Congregationalism in relation to dismission: "If a church should think the removal of a pastor desirable, a regular procedure would be, for the deacons, or some of the older members of the church, to converse freely and frankly with him, state their convictions, and suggest to him the expediency of asking a dismission from the church. If the pastor should decline so to do, they might then desire him to call a meeting of the church for the purpose of conferring together, and acting, should it be judged expedient, in reference to the matter. The pastor would, of course, absent himself from such a meeting, unless he had some special communication to make to the church; or he would retire after having opened it in the usual form, and stated the object of the meeting. The church being thus left by themselves,

would proceed to discuss the subject before them; if agreed in opinion, they would appoint a committee to lay before the pastor their reasons for wishing a dissolution of the pastoral connection, and request him to unite with them in calling a council to consider the matter, and advise in the premises. Should he decline their offer of a *mutual* council, the church would then be entitled to the advice of an *ex parte* council. The way would thus be prepared for an orderly adjustment of the business upon Christian and Congregational principles." Page 176.

This must needs be a very painful business for both the minister and the people, let the proceedings be ever so regular. But the process does not always relieve the church of the incumbent. The council may advise contrary to the wishes of the former, and the minister may avail himself of the advice of the council. Hence churches, finding legitimate measures both tardy and often unavailing, frequently resort to those which are more prompt and effective in their operation. Mr. Punchard

observes, in a note: "I regret to say that our churches are not always so observant of the course pointed out in the text as they should be." Page 177.

One method of effecting the removal of a minister, is, to make the impression, by slanderous accusations and insinuations, that his usefulness is at an end, and so produce universal dissatisfaction: and by the same means, with the addition of manifest personal neglect, and often personal insult, to make his condition so uncomfortable, that he is glad to conform to their wishes, in order to escape from intolerable suffering. The Congregational Observer, for July 10th, 1841, a paper published in Connecticut for some years, but recently discontinued, contains "A RECIPE FOR DRIVING AWAY A FAITHFUL MINISTER." I copy it for the benefit of all concerned:—

"Begin the quarrel with great boldness and great violence; set afloat a multiude of stories, no matter how false or absurd, or how easily disproved. If they should be in fact disproved, be careful to repeat them, and keep them moving briskly, and

make a handsome addition to them. Assume the fact that the very existence of such a state of things proves that the minister's usefulness is gone. Profess a strong regard for the peace of the parish, and, at the same time, influence the passions of angry malice and envy by every species of falsehood, and every vulgar artifice which ingenuity can devise. Seek occasion to converse on the parish difficulties, and a moderate share of cunning will enable you to accuse him openly and publicly of falsehood. By this time a great number of persons scattered through the vicinity will begin to say, 'The man *must have been imprudent*, he must have given *some occasion*, or these stories could not exist. His usefulness is gone; and the sooner he leaves the people the better.'—*Review of the Dorchester Controversy.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

The starvation plan—Cautionary measures recommended—Adverse consequences of changes—Alienation of brethren—Division.

ANOTHER of the disgraceful measures sometimes resorted to by those churches that elect their pastors, for the purpose of displacing an unacceptable incumbent, may be called *the starvation plan.*

Mr. Punchard, referring to it, observes: "Neither Congregationalism, nor any other ism but *barbarism*, countenances the practice of starving or driving a minister from his pastoral charge." Page 177. This may be true; but the unsatisfactory provision for effecting changes, which characterizes the electing system, results in the application of this measure in innumerable instances. A writer in the New-England Puritan, for August 19th, 1841, over the signature of R. C., gives us a little insight into the operation of this device: "As a result of these causes, a small minority in a parish, by closely watching the conduct

and preaching of a minister, and carefully husbanding their stock of real or imaginary grievances, and making the most of them at the next annual meeting, and then refusing to subscribe anything for the next year's salary, and inducing others to do the same; in this way a very few individuals may so embarrass a large parish as to make it necessary to dismiss an able and faithful minister." And there is reason for believing that, when the starving regimen is adopted, those who do subscribe are not always scrupulously honorable in the payment of their subscriptions.

Those difficulties may be diminished, perhaps, where the pastor is hired for a year, or where it is stipulated that the connection shall be dissolved on either of the parties giving three months' notice; but this is obviously an innovation upon the plan of a settled ministry. The writer just quoted pronounces it a "wretched policy" —"creating the impression that the engagement, with a settled pastor even, was only a contract to be renewed or annulled, at the pleasure of the parish, at the end of

the year." And neither of these arrangements avoids the difficulties named. The same writer, referring to the case of a minister who had been dismissed a little more than a year after his settlement, states that "the council were informed that the pastor had been settled but two or three months, when the disaffected began freely to discuss the question, whether he should be employed another year? and in this way, and by the influence used to withhold subscriptions to the salary, the dismission was effected." He recommends that, in order to prevent the evils deplored, the minister shall take the precaution "to secure, by a written and formal contract, his rights, the condition of the mutual union, and the manner alone in which it can be dissolved; then," he adds, "the business of a parish meeting is not to listen to slander and abuse of the pastor, or to discuss the question whether they shall longer employ him, but merely to choose officers, and take the necessary steps for raising the salary." Now this may be the true policy in connection with this system, but let it be kept

in mind that it proposes to prevent the evils complained of by restricting the boasted freedom of the churches in choosing their pastors. Having chosen one, he is to be fastened upon them, whether they are suited or disappointed. They must take him "for better, for worse." When they come together in their parish meetings, it is to be no part of their business to discuss the question whether they shall longer employ him. That question is no longer open. All they have to do is to choose officers and take the necessary steps for raising the salary. And, to prevent the application of the starving principle, he recommends the laying aside of the "wretched custom of subscribing annually, instead of taxing, for the support of the ministry."

Besides all this, the dismission of a minister frequently lays the ground of alienation of feeling among the members of the church, and sometimes results in a division. He has a party which regards him as an injured man, and is prepared to vindicate him by the strongest measures.

If his friends remain in the church from which he is dismissed, they hear with disrelish any praise which may be awarded to the new pastor as an implied reflection on his predecessor, and watch for opportunities to effect his removal. If they leave the church, and organize another for the benefit of their favorite, they will probably embarrass themselves by erecting an edifice too large and expensive for their limited resources, and, after a brief and desperate struggle, conclude that they must abandon the enterprise of sustaining a new church, or dismiss the minister for whom they have incurred their harassing responsibilities, and procure, if possible, the services of one who can bring to their aid the influence of novelty and popularity.

CHAPTER IX.

Reputation of the ministry injured—Temporal embarrassments resulting—Personal degradation submitted to.

Removals upon the plan referred to in the preceding chapter are found to operate unfavorably upon the character of the ministry. If the minister seek a dismission merely for the sake of being more useful, he is liable to be regarded as unstable and capricious. If his object be to escape difficulties which threaten to destroy his peace, he is deficient in courage or fortitude. If he remove to a more wealthy congregation, he is suspected of mercenary motives. If he be dismissed at the instance of the church, he must encounter suspicions of some important ministerial disqualification. The essayist, in the Puritan, for August 19th, 1841, on Ex-pastors, states, that "the fact of dismission of itself tends to extend distrust and prejudice. Hence explanations vindicating them from injurious suspicions become necessary; and they are constrained, in seeking intro-

ductions to places for employment, to rehearse again and again the material facts of their antecedent ministry."

Another difficulty which embarrasses removals on the plan we are discussing is, the peculiar inconveniences to which the minister may be put in reference to his temporal interests and his feelings. Perhaps he is a young man who, having waited a reasonable time, and entered upon his ministerial career, has united himself, by matrimonial obligations, to the object of his highest earthly attachments. The salary allowed him is barely enough, or perhaps insufficient, to support him in the style in which he is expected to live, and to furnish him with the requisite appliances for the effective prosecution of his ministry. He must go in debt to furnish his house, with the hope that a few years of economy will enable him to discharge his obligations. But in less than two years, perhaps in less than one, he is dismissed. He is without resources, unless he has been so fortunate as to have married the daughter of some person in good circumstances, and so can

quarter his family upon his father-in-law. He must now look out for another place. But I will allow one who is evidently familiar with the subject to depict the trials which often ensue. Let me again introduce the writer on Ex-pastors: "With the termination of his pastoral relation his salary has ceased, and, as a general fact, the loss of means of support brings him into a straitened pecuniary condition. He may be possessed of property, affording him a resource adequate to sustain him and his family without the avails of ministerial labor. This, however, must be only the exception to the ordinary rule. If, when becoming a pastor, he was in debt for his education; and then, in procuring a situation for residence among the people of his charge, another debt was contracted; how, without ministerial employment, and without an income from it, he shall procure even his bread, without inquiring how he shall educate his children, becomes a problem of no easy solution. With a burdened heart he is constrained to inquire, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to

do?' Repulsed, disappointed in his efforts to obtain a location for ministerial labor, and with only scanty pecuniary resources, the inquiry is forced upon him, 'Is it my duty to leave the ministry, and resort to some other method of earning a support?' But he has consecrated himself, and has been *officially consecrated* by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, to this one work. He loves it, and desires it, and shrinks from the proposal to turn aside to any secular occupation. It seems a violation of the vows of ordination, and may argue a want of faith, of self-denial, and fortitude, and peradventure may bring blame or suspicion upon the holy office. Will his glorious Master—when unconverted sinners are dying and going to judgment in untold numbers—will he refuse him bread, if he will but abide by his profession, and go forth to his work? To be a teacher of youth, if he leave the pulpit for the school room; to be a writer for the press, if he leave the sacred function for authorship; to be a commissioned agent for some public charity, if he leave the

stated preaching of the word for such an occasional service; is not, in the proper sense, giving himself to the ministry and fulfilling it, and is not occupying the sphere of labor entered upon at his ordination. His habits are not formed for any proposed occupation foreign from that of a pastor. How long, then, shall he proffer his services, and seek out opportunities for obtaining a field of pastoral labor, and when ought he to resort to other employment? Here are trials of heart and of conscience—here are conflicting doubts and fears—here are struggles in the bosom of the husband and father, when he thinks of his wife and children, and where and how they shall be sheltered, and clothed, and fed, constituting one part of the experience of ex-pastors. Shall one in these circumstances continue to present himself to the public notice, by correspondence, and by engaging the kind offices of his ministerial brethren, to introduce and recommend him to places destitute of pastors, and that, too, when he finds these brethren burdened almost beyond endu-

rance by the multitude of such applicants, and vacant churches are brought to their wits' end to determine which of the numerous suitors to select? He finds candidating itinerancy puts the courteousness and hospitality of his pastoral brethren to a severe test, and brings him into painful collision with other candidating brethren, who have antecedently offered, or are at the same time offering, their services. A bold, unblushing spirit, might feel little the embarrassment of such circumstances; but ordinary modesty, meekness, and politeness, find all their resources put in requisition. But he is losing time, and spending the small funds which he can command, by lengthened experimenting of this kind, and necessity will compel him to stop, unless he is willing to cast himself and his family as paupers upon the community. And when this necessity seems fully to come upon him, it is with an aching heart that he is compelled to leave the ministry of the word for some secular occupation; and if he is found by a zealous ministerial brother at the plough, or behind the counter,

he must answer the interrogatory, 'What dost thou here, Elijah?' Have you any adequate reason to assign for declining to cast yourself still upon the churches for ministerial employment?"

To the suggestion that these persons may go to the west, where there is a demand for ministers, the essayist replies: "Ministers dismissed from enfeebled churches, though ardently loving their work, cannot always go to the distant west and plant themselves where they please as ministers, and pursue their appropriate work, just as the purchaser of a farm covered with dense forests takes his ax and fells the stately trees around him, and rears his log house. They have not the funds, peradventure, to engage in such an enterprise, or the state of their families forbids the exposure of penetrating the wilderness. With none dependent upon them they might do otherwise, and fall in with the tide of immigration, and seek them a place, and adopt the expedients of western adventurers to sustain themselves, while striving to plant the gospel in the wilder-

ness. God forbid that the writer, after he had himself witnessed the condition of some churches in a few of the western settlements, and labored and sympathized with them, should stop one of his brethren who is qualified and disposed to go forth to the great and good work. But many unsettled ministers, who might efficiently and usefully labor for years as pastors in the older states, cannot encounter, after the vigor of their days has passed away, the hazards and difficulties of transferring themselves to the great western valley, without high presumption, and great injustice and cruelty to their households. Consequently, without opportunities for resuming pastoral labor in the New-England and older states, they are necessarily precluded from their work."

Again: "How many, after solicitously and honestly endeavoring to find where they might be again stationed, and statedly labor in the ministry, have been defeated, and forced, with aching hearts, to cast about for some other means and expedients to save themselves and families from

pinching penury, the writer will not undertake to state. He is satisfied it is not small; and without a change in the modes of thinking and acting, prevalent within a few years past in regard to the relation of pastors to their people, it must be increased."

These difficulties are not to be set down to ministerial incompetency. They arise from the demand for a popular ministry which the electing system naturally creates, and which is stimulated by the contiguity of rival churches of other denominations, or of the same denomination. The writer just quoted attributes them, in part, to "the demand for a peculiar style of preaching, winning fame by its brilliancy, or startling by its extravagant characteristics."

CHAPTER X.

Same subject continued.

By our plan we are spared the painful and humiliating task of exploring the country as candidates for pastorships. This point deserves a separate and protracted consideration. The long quotations, in the chapter immediately preceding, make developments to which we may profitably recur. The minister destitute of a church must "present himself to public notice by correspondence, and by engaging the kind offices of his ministerial brethren, to introduce and recommend him to places destitute of pastors, and that too when he finds these brethren burdened almost beyond endurance by the multitude of such applicants, and vacant churches are brought to their wits' end to determine which of the numerous suitors to select." This is degrading enough, and yet it is but the beginning of degradation.

He finds that "candidating itinerancy puts the courteousness and hospitality of

his pastoral brethren to a severe test, and brings him into painful collision with other candidating brethren, who have antecedently offered, or are at the same time offering, their services." Worse, and still worse! "A bold and unblushing spirit might feel little the embarrassment of such circumstances, but ordinary modesty, meekness, and politeness, find all their resources put in requisition." No doubt of that! Poor modesty, meekness, and politeness!! "But he is losing time, and spending the small funds which he can command, by lengthened experimenting of this kind."

I appeal to the reader to say if this is not a melancholy representation? And if the candidate should succeed so far as to be received on probation, he may be notified, at the expiration of three or six months, after he has been watched, and scrutinized, and his merits and defects discussed in every company and place of resort, and has passed through the most harassing solicitude, that his services are not acceptable. He then goes

with a crushed spirit to another place, it may be to pass through a similar ordeal with similar success. And yet he may be called of God to the work of the ministry, and may possess qualifications for eminent usefulness, if he only were in the right place, and could be received with cordiality, and sustained with confidence for one or two years at a time. Should he make up his mind to encounter no longer the mortification incident to "candidating," he is liable to be reproached with a want of perseverance, or with a slight attachment to the sacred office, and, perhaps, with a criminal forgetfulness of the vows of his consecration. Highly talented and distinguished men may not be under the necessity of thus going about. Their services may be sought eagerly after. But this will be their peculiar privilege. Now this privilege, so far as exemption from "candidating" is concerned, belongs to every itinerant Methodist minister, however humble. He does not expect to escape difficulties. He knows that he must labor hard, receiving but little recompense on earth.

But then he is not subject to such hardships and degradation as have just been described. Itinerancy subjects him to many serious inconveniences; but, thank God, he knows nothing of "candidating itinerancy." I have heard of ministers, who, reposing in assured dignity upon their talents and acquisitions, have refused to come down so far as to preach trial sermons before the churches desiring their services, notwithstanding their system sanctions, and even requires, the practice. This is high ground—and yet *every Methodist preacher may occupy it.* If one among us is suspected of seeking the preference of a circuit or station, with a view to their soliciting his services, he is looked upon as having *compromised the dignity of his office.*

It might be apprehended, with some degree of plausibility, that the degradation of the individual minister would result, to some extent, in the degradation of the ministerial office. A writer in a recent number of the American Biblical Repository, Professor I. M. Sturtevant, of Illinois Col-

lege, Jacksonville, Illinois, in an article on "*The Education of Indigent Young Men for the Ministry*," speaking of such as find their services unacceptable, says: "But they do not suffer alone. The community suffers with them. The ministry goes begging, and suffers degradation in the popular esteem." Again, he inquires: "Is not the number of candidates for any vacant place, and their zeal to obtain it, such as to make the impression that the ministry is filled with mere place-seekers, hanging on the church for a living?"

Now, in all that I have written upon this subject, I have not designed the least reflection upon the piety and intelligence of our brethren of other denominations. This investigation has attached me more closely to them in affection and sympathy. I cannot overlook that many of them are far more favorably situated, so far as temporal advantages are concerned, than any Methodist preachers can hope to be. But this is not the case with all. We have no monopoly of ministerial privations and sacrifices, and are not entitled to a mo-

nopoly of the church's sympathy. I see that the Christian ministry, viewed in the aggregate, must have its many and sore trials, and that no plan of dividing its labor and its support can protect the ministry of any denomination from its share in these trials.

CHAPTER XI.

Superiority of Methodism further illustrated—Provides for a more effective employment of ministerial talent—Auspicious influence upon young men—Retains old men longer in effective service.

Now our system presents a cheering contrast to the other, not only in reference to "candidating," but in many other respects. In its operations, removals cause no such demoralizing and disastrous agitations. They imply no deficiency on the part of the minister, or delinquency on the part of members. He retains their affections; and when the time for his transfer comes, they send him away with good wishes, and with fervent prayers that his labors may be blessed in his new field. And

when his successor comes, no one regards him with suspicion as the supplanter of an injured favorite. He is looked upon as sent of God, and hailed with joyous interest. Nor is the minister who leaves thrown upon the wide world, without a people over whom he may watch, and by whom he may be supported. The very act which dissolves his pastoral relation to one church, places him in the same relation to another. Thus he is never without a church, and such a support as they may be able or willing to give him, so long as he is able to perform efficient pastoral labor. With us, churches are never without pastors, and pastors never without churches.

Methodism employs to the best possible advantage those ministers who possess moderate talents and acquisitions. More than ordinary ability is necessary for a minister to sustain himself in acceptability and usefulness for many years, in the same place. There are hundreds of men among us, eminently useful, who would very soon be obliged to retire from the

work, were we to adopt the plan of a settled ministry. In saying this I do not design to disparage, and do not, in fact, disparage, our ministry, in comparison with that of other denominations; for there are among them, at this day, hundreds without employment, not because they have not qualifications for usefulness—they have advantages over most of us, in respect to literary training—but because they are unable to meet the demands of the age upon a settled ministry. They cannot sustain longer than one or two years the competition they are destined to meet with. A Methodist "circuit rider," so called in derision, shall be sent to the place where one of them is settled, much inferior to him in education, but who, having the advantage of freshness and novelty, shall excite an interest which he is no longer able to excite. His people become mortified and discontented. They expect of him, not only that he will keep pace with the Methodist preacher, but that, by leaving him far behind, he will obviously illustrate the often alledged superiority of a classically

educated minister, over any one not so qualified. The result is his dismission. A very few dismissions render his prospect of a resettlement eminently precarious. He goes down; while in consequence of timely change, the energetic Methodist preacher rises continually in public estimation.

I regard it as by no means a light consideration that we are thus enabled to avail ourselves more fully of deep piety for ministerial purposes, and are less dependent upon men who have little or nothing else to recommend them to the ministry than learning and splendid talents. If learned men, endowed with deep humility, choose to come among us, and share with us in our labors and privations, we welcome them, we esteem them, we reverence them. Many such we have in our connection. But if they cannot stoop to the plans and labors of the Methodist ministry, we are willing that they should go where they can surround themselves with more congenial circumstances.

From the foregoing remarks it may be

inferred that the scheme we advocate acts propitiously upon the prospects and usefulness of young men just entering the ministry.

It also finds employment for old men as long as they are able to do effective service. The other consigns them to silence and obscurity, when, as yet, their power for usefulness is but slightly diminished. Here allow me to introduce again the eloquent writer on Ex-pastors:—

"Vacant churches and parishes, having the like predilection for a young pastor, decline the services of the older candidates, dismissed from their former charges, and wait the opportunity of securing the settlement of some one who has but just girded on the ministerial armor. Thus the same cause that removes a minister from his charge, in this case acts with equal potency to preclude him from resuming it in any other place. To a great extent, this is the explanation of the unsuccessfulness of many ex-pastors, in their efforts to obtain resettlement. The ministerial committee of the church and parish feel bound

to say to older applicants for employment, though well recommended, and though themselves satisfied with their preaching, (if they speak the popular sentiment,) 'We want a young man, in all the vigor of body and mind, who will grow up and live with us for many years, and not one who is on the down-hill of life.'"—*New-England Puritan, June* 12*th*, 1841.

CHAPTER XII.

Our system equalizes more than any other the labors and support of the ministry—Distributes more equally the gifts of the ministry—Opens a wider field of usefulness.

We claim it as an excellence of our system that it equalizes, more than any other, the condition of the ministry. All must subject themselves to the same liabilities. All must be in equal readiness to go wherever sent. It is true, there cannot be perfect equality. Some circuits and stations are more eligible than others, and some ministers are gifted with superior qualifications. That the ablest ministers should, as a ge-

neral rule, be found in connection with the most important stations, is to be expected. But no preacher can fasten upon a pleasant station and monopolize its advantages. He who is now favored must change place with his brother, who, perhaps, has been suffering great personal inconveniences for the good of the common cause. Thus an equality is preserved. One is not eased all the time, and another continually burdened. The inequality on the other plan is very great. Some, owing to a conjuncture of very favorable circumstances and the influence of powerful friends, are placed early in connection with wealthy and liberal congregations, and receive large salaries, by which they are able to surround themselves with every supposable advantage for study and personal comfort. While others, with equal qualifications for usefulness, and perhaps with talents equally attractive, must spend their years in connection with comparatively small and burdened congregations, unable, if willing, to give more than a mere living. And others still must be tossed upon the billows of

change, uncertain whether they will reach some friendly haven, or founder amid the waves, or suffer ministerial shipwreck on some desert shore.

It may also be said in favor of our system, that it distributes more equally and extensively than any other the gifts of the ministry. God has endowed the ministry with various gifts for the edification of the church. He has not only conferred diversified gifts upon the same individual, but has also distinguished some by peculiar endowments of nature and grace. These ministers are the servants of the whole church; their gifts are the property of the whole church. We cannot think that the leading churches of New-York, or Philadelphia, or Baltimore, or any other place, have a right to seize upon the most distinguished men, and make an exclusive appropriation of their services for life. We very much doubt whether it was possible for the church at Ephesus to acquire an exclusive right to the services of Paul, although he might profitably spend three years there. No. It was important that

he should depart thence to preach the gospel in other places.

The theory of a settled ministry gives to a congregation the monopoly of a minister's gifts. The necessity of change is deprecated. If a young minister receives a call to an important congregation, and retains their preference, and continues with them until entirely disabled by old age, he is supposed to have gained a most enviable triumph over adverse tendencies. His case is looked upon as exemplifying a chief excellence of the system. But we cannot see why the eminent gifts which enable a man to sustain himself so long in connection with an important congregation should not be employed for the benefit of other congregations. Why should not other churches be enlightened by his reasoning, stirred by his eloquence, and impelled by his energy? Why should not the cloud, so richly surcharged, pass on to water other regions? Let it be kept in mind that the most powerful men are the most likely to be thus restricted. Even an occasional exchange of pulpits is not without

danger to the congregation, if not to the minister.

These remarks suggest another of the peculiar advantages of Methodism. The minister settled for life preaches from year to year to a few hundreds, and these, with few variations, the same persons. The Methodist preacher preaches to thousands upon thousands. It is as if the great Head of the church should, on giving him his commission, bear him to some elevated spot, and place before him, on a vast area, an innumerable multitude, and say,—Behold thy parish. Here is thy congregation. Thou canst not minister to all at the same time. I therefore divide them into companies of hundreds. Thou shalt preach for one year to this company, and another to this, and two years to this, and so on, until thou shalt have delivered thy message to all. Meantime I will send others before thy face who shall prepare thy way before thee. I will also cause others to follow thee, and enter into thy labors, so that the fruit thereof shall not be lost.

CHAPTER XIII.

Our system carries the gospel and its ordinances where they could not be carried upon any other plan—Affecting picture of moral desolations incident to the opposite scheme—These avoided by Methodism—Keeps churches supplied, and ministers employed.

Our system enables us to carry the gospel, and the ordinances of Christianity, where they could not be carried on the other system, and is, consequently, a more effective instrumentality in the accomplishment of the gospel commission. If a place is able to sustain a minister, and sufficient reasons exist why it should have the entire services of one, our plan provides for its steady and permanent supply.

But there may be a great many places, within a given district of country, not one of which is capable of sustaining a minister; and yet it is important that all these places should be steadily supplied with all the means of grace. It is in vain to suppose that the people of an extensive district of country will travel great distances,

to some central point, where a large parish church may be located. Now our itinerancy enables us to reach the most remote and neglected neighborhoods. They are not favored with an occasional sermon merely. Two preachers, placed on a circuit, will travel several hundreds of miles in the course of a month, and supply thirty different places with preaching, as often as once in two weeks. And should there be, within the bounds of the circuit, a place of more importance than the rest, arrangements may be made to supply it with preaching on every sabbath-day. Nor are these places supplied with preaching only. At each place the believers are formed into societies, or branch churches, united under the pastorship of the circuit. Each of these churches is supplied with all the ordinances of Christianity. The ecclesiastical rights and privileges of each member are the same as those enjoyed in the more favored stations. They have regular pastoral supervision. So far from its being necessary that there should be church edifices to worship in, or a population able or

willing to support a minister, in order to secure church privileges, it is enough that a school-house, or a barn, or a private dwelling, can be procured, and a very small number of believers united. It is by the operation of this plan that we have been able to follow the tide of immigration to the west, and preach the gospel and organize churches in the log cabins of the remotest frontier settlers. By its powerful and effective working, these small societies are fostered, until they acquire strength enough to stand alone, each supporting its own minister; and even until the original circuit, divided and subdivided, becomes, at last, a conference territory, with its multitude of preachers, its districts, circuits, and stations.

And should churches, barely able, in their highest prosperity, to sustain pastors, become feeble, this plan obviates the necessity of their becoming destitute. They can fall back into the contiguous circuits. This may not be very pleasant. To recede from an advanced position is not usually desirable. But churches, like in-

dividuals, are liable to adverse changes. Now what can churches in such a condition do on the plan of a settled ministry, elected and called by the churches themselves? Their pastors have been obliged to leave them, and they need not call others. By just such disastrous circumstances, multitudes of churches of other denominations have been broken up. The thorn and the thistle have come upon their altars. Others are obliged to remain for a long time without the ministry of the word and the sacraments. A sad picture of desolation, from this cause, is drawn in a "Report of the Directors of the Missionary Society of Connecticut, auxiliary to the A. H. M. S.," published in the Congregational Observer:—

"In making their twenty-fifth annual report, the directors deem it not unsuitable to glance at the condition of the feeble churches in this state a quarter of a century ago—as the review will present a contrast, which, if not all we could wish, may still be enough to excite our warmest gratitude. A sermon preached in the year

1814, which had no small influence in causing the organization of this society, has the following language:

"'That there are desolations in this state, will not be questioned by any minutely acquainted with our circumstances. Not a few societies have ceased to hear those doctrines of the gospel by the instrumentality of which the Spirit of God awakens, converts, and sanctifies men. A number of churches have become feeble, and by hard struggling prolong, from year to year, the enjoyment of divine institutions; while some have long since fallen, and are lying now in utter desolation.

"'Societies might be named, where the church is extinct and the house of God in ruins. The blasts of winter rave through it, the flocks of summer find a shelter in it. The sabbath is a holiday. The authority of revelation has ceased with many, and by others is employed to sanction doctrines not less destructive than atheism. Preachers are patronized, whose object it is to keep the audience laughing by ridiculing the ministers and the doctrines of

the gospel. A revival of religion would be regarded with as virulent enmity as Jews or pagans regarded Christianity. There are, in this state, districts as far from heaven—and, without help, as hopeless of heaven—as the pagans of Hindostan or China.

"'From these wastes also sally forth the infidel, seeking whom he may devour; the Universalist, to quiet profligates in sin, and multiply their number; the political empiric, to augment his party; and the sectarian of every name, to proselyte, until a broad circumference around shall become as divided, and weak, and desolate, as Babel itself. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Their word eateth as doth a canker. Facts, lamentable facts, may be found in this state, to justify these apprehensions. There are at this moment, in this state, waste places which exert precisely the kind of influence which we have ascribed to them.'"

The report from which the above is extracted is signed, "Horace Hooker, Secretary, Hartford, June 14, 1841." The writer

on "Ex-pastors," in the article published July 17, 1841, on the causes of the removal of pastors, makes the following observation:

"Truth and justice also demand the statement, that the smallness of numbers and pecuniary ability, in many churches, have broken up the connection between them and their pastors, who were settled with the fixed determination to sustain privations, and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The number of churches in Vermont represented as unable to sustain settled pastors has thus become as great, if not greater, than those having the requisite ability."

The application of missionary funds collected in the abler churches, for the assistance of feebler ones, has of late years obviated or remedied, to some extent, the difficulties thus eloquently and affectingly portrayed. The missionary report states, that "appropriations were made the past year to thirty-two feeble churches in Connecticut."

But the abler churches will have something to do, if they undertake to sustain, in

whole, or in part, settled ministers in all the feeble churches already in existence, and also to found churches and sustain pastors in all places where they are needed.

Now no such reports of desolations and destitutions occur in the history of Methodism. The superiority of its economy appears in this, that it can embrace in the circuits all those churches that are too feeble for self-support, and can, in the mean time, go on enlarging the boundaries of its domain, by raising up other churches in every direction. This is its regular action. Besides its aggressive activity, it wields a *conservative power*, which goes far toward explaining the fact of its unparalleled success. And if it be necessary to make a temporary application of missionary funds to places too isolated to be brought conveniently into circuit relations, or affected by other peculiar circumstances, Methodism can as easily avail itself of this provision as any other system.

It prevents the serious loss which accrues from multitudes of ministers being without employment, while nearly as many, if

not more, churches are vacant. This state of things results inevitably from the electing plan. Neither churches nor ministers will be in haste to make engagements, when change is attended with so much difficulty. Why should a minister accept a call to some feeble country church, unable to support him comfortably, when the very next mail may bring a call to one far more eligible? Why should he expend his money and time in traveling far west, for a church, when a little patient waiting may procure him one where he would greatly prefer to labor? It is too much to require of ministers a readiness to sacrifice everything, while churches are disposed to sacrifice nothing. It is an uncontrollable consequence of this plan, that, at any given period, there will be a number of churches without pastors, and ministers without churches. Not so with ours. Each minister holds himself in readiness to be sent, and each church holds itself in readiness to receive the messenger, saying, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!" Hence

we have not a throng of ministerial idlers crowding the market places, waiting to be hired, or negotiating the terms on which they will go to work in the vineyard.

CHAPTER XIV.

Additional objections considered—The Methodist itinerant ministry shown to be permanent—Favorable to the diffusion of religious knowledge and to growth in piety.

I NOW proceed to notice some other objections.

Mr. Tyler, in his Congregational Catechism, at the close of his article on the Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, objects that our system is "contrary" to the "highest advancement of the members in Christian knowledge and experience." This, he says, requires a "permanent ministry." What does he mean by a *permanent ministry?* He either misapprehends the facts of the case, or is somewhat unfortunate in his phraseology. The itinerant Methodist ministry is per-

manent. It is constant and unceasing. Much is said about "the permanency of the pastoral relation." Perhaps this is what he has reference to. Here, as I have shown, our ministry has the advantage greatly. Our pastoral relation never ceases, never intermits, so long as we possess the requisite qualifications. The mere change of a pastor, from one part of the field to another, does not suspend the relation. The very act which dissolves his pastoral relation to one church places him in the same relation to another. The churches are never without pastors. The pastors are never without churches. Whereas, on his system, multitudes of ministers are thrown out of that relation, while their eligibility is unimpaired, and while multitudes of churches are destitute of pastors. This ambiguous phraseology is designed to signify a permanent union between a particular church and a particular minister. But if this be necessary to constitute a permanent ministry, and to secure the "highest edification and improvement of the people," the permanent ministry in-

cludes but a very few individuals; and but very few of the churches—even of those which elect their pastors—are favored with the advantages described.

I acknowledge that if it can be made to appear that our system is less effective than any other, in accomplishing any of the leading objects of the Christian ministry, an important point will be gained by the objector. The grand reason why we prefer it will be invalidated. It has often required immense sacrifices, and the cheerfulness with which they have been submitted to, has arisen from the conviction, that it is the most effective in promoting the spread and advancement of holiness. And we still think that a reference to results will justify this preference.

The author of the Catechism does not go into particulars, and show how his system exemplifies its superiority in this respect. This was prevented doubtless by the brevity which his plan required. The argument is, however, ably presented by the Rev. Dr. Porter of Farmington, in an essay on the "Permancy of the Pastoral

Relation," which appeared in the New-York Evangelist, February 22, 1844. Dr. Porter is not professedly objecting to our system, but to the policy of frequent changes, and especially in the ministry of the Congregational churches.

I refer to his essay because it contains the arguments usually urged against our itinerancy. He remarks: "A minister who has only a transient connection with a church needs but a few discourses, and will be furnished with but few. These for the most part will be composed on the more prominent topics of the gospel, or those which are best adapted to popular effect. With the delivery of them his work begins and ends, and, being done, is followed by the same thing over again, with some variety of voice and manner, by the ministration of another. Under such instructions, unless the defect be supplied by other means, the churches, if not as children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine—are yet children, instead of being carried forward according to the design of the Christian min-

istry, 'unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' This design, to say the least, is best attained by the stated instructions of 'pastors and teachers.' They are obliged, by the sameness of their auditories, 'to bring forth continually from their treasuries, as wise householders, things new and old;' 'to give attendance to reading, to meditation, to doctrine, that their profiting may appear unto all; to acquire that various learning, and employ it to give that interest, variety, comprehensiveness, and effect, to their ministrations, without which, when the chain of novelty is gone, their hold on their hearers must soon be enfeebled." The doctor also instances "the appropriateness of the ministrations of the settled ministry. They are not the random discourses of a stranger," &c.

This description of the transient minister may apply to the candidate, and stated supplies, of those churches which elect their pastors; but it is not to be taken as a just portraiture of the Methodist ministry. The number of discourses required by a min-

istry of two years, in a station, is not so inconsiderable. Suppose that two are required on each sabbath, the whole number will be two hundred and eight. And if these are composed "mostly on the leading topics" of the gospel, I apprehend this will be no disadvantage. These are, after all, the most important topics, and there will be need of their coming up frequently. Nor does the work of an itinerant Methodist minister begin and end with the delivery of his sermons. He is required to attend to the whole round of pastoral duties. His case may be compared with that of a Congregational or Presbyterian pastor who should serve his congregation faithfully for two years, and then be removed by death. Nor is it certain that his successor will go over precisely the same ground. The fact of Methodist preachers succeeding each other, as they do, makes it a dangerous thing for them to preach each other's sermons, or to borrow from a common source, as may be done by a settled ministry. They are sure to be detected in either of these practices.

They must make their own sermons. There will, therefore, in all probability, be a great variety in the manner in which they discuss the leading topics of the gospel. Nor can I believe that the preaching of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians is so stereotyped, that one minister cannot follow another without repeating just what his predecessor has said. The representation of Dr. Porter appears to me to be too strong for the facts of the case.

CHAPTER XV.

Our system provides suitably for the universal fondness for novelty—Probable result of systematic and judicious change of pastors in other denominations—Affords ample opportunity for giving varied instruction.

It must be admitted, that ministers settled for life will be obliged to study laboriously, if they retain their hold upon their congregations. But how few succeed? I mean, how few of the great number licensed and ordained. This may be owing, in some instances, to indolence or inability. Many, however, neither indolent nor unqualified,

will often be under the necessity of coming before the people with crude productions, badly arranged, badly written, and badly delivered. The various calls and duties, the numerous unforeseen hinderances, to which a pastor is liable, will often make the work of preparation a very hurried process; and so far from appropriateness being the thing considered, the inquiry will be, How shall I procure something to say? It is not an easy work to prepare good sermons. Many settled ministers repeat their old ones with great frequency, sometimes in connection with the same text of Scripture, and sometimes with a change of text. And should their discourses be all suitably elaborated, and characterized by the desired variety and appropriateness, it will still be difficult for them to keep up the attention and interest of their congregations for a long series of years. The people become familiar with their style of thought and expression. They may bring out of their treasuries *new* things, but their hearers will scarcely distinguish them from the *old*. Of what

avail will be all their labor if it is not appreciated? So far as my observation and information have gone, the ablest settled ministers, as a general rule, lose their power to affect their congregations greatly on the subject of religion, after preaching to them two or three years. They may keep up their reputation for learning, for eloquence, for piety. They may be regarded, and justly so, as the ablest ministers of the places where they are settled. They may be sustained by the intellectual and wealthy portions of society, and by the influence of powerful families; but they will not often be the immediate instruments of revivals. Inquire into the history of the revivals occurring in their churches, should there be any, and you will find that, passing over the first two or three years of their settlement in any place, the immediate instrumentality has been the labors of some stranger, who has had no other advantage over the settled minister than the power with which novelty invested him. Undoubtedly it is from this source that evangelists derive much of

their ability to stir the communities in which they labor. This desire for novelty may be denounced as an evil—a thing to be discouraged, if not wholly suppressed. That it is adverse to the interests of a settled ministry is obvious. But I ask, Is it not natural? Has it not been planted in our nature for wise purposes? Would not the absence of it produce a most unwholesome stagnation in society? Is not that plan of distributing ministerial labor the best, which, while it provides uninterrupted pastoral oversight and instruction, avails itself of the great power of change? Does not that system which makes no such provision contravene an original law of human nature? Would it be a great disadvantage, on the score of piety and Christian knowledge, to the churches concerned, if certain eminent men in this community, whom I forbear to name, were to change places, after the manner of the Methodist ministry? What churches in the country would suffer in these respects by two years' ministerial service from any

one of them? Would not such a period be memorable in the history of any church? His discourses would not be regarded as the random discourses of a stranger, and inappropriate. And if each particular church should not gain by every change, the aggregate of gain to all the churches would be equal to the entire amount of wholesome mental stimulus secured by the judicious change of a host of able ministers of the new covenant.

But selfishness or bigotry would suggest that I should forego this course of remark; for if some denominations, which I could name, were to adopt our system, with their richly endowed and carefully selected ministry, there would be such a stir among their churches and the communities in which they are located as they have never seen, and we should be divested of one of our prominent advantages.

Dr. Porter admits that "there is less novelty in the ministrations of the same persons from year to year, than in those of a succession of individuals," and that

"so far as this alone may be supposed to have influence, they are less suited to fix the attention and move the heart." But does not the great secret of success in preaching consist in fixing the attention and moving the heart? What if there should not be quite so great a variety of topics in the preaching of an itinerant ministry, will not that preaching, which invests with frequent and exciting interest the great fundamental truths of Christianity, be likely to do more good than that which discusses them on distant occasions, and with less interest, filling up long intervals with discourses on subordinate topics, to avoid the appearance of sameness? He further admits "that there are also individuals whose constitutional susceptibilities or habits of life are better suited to a reception of truth in one form than another; and who would, therefore, in some instances, be profited by a change of the ministry, even though the succeeding one were, on the whole, to be no better than the former."

This is a very important consideration. He also adds: "There are those, too, whose prejudices prevent that benefit from the pastor under whom they live which they would receive from another." This fact should not be overlooked.

CHAPTER XVI.

Our system not unfavorable to study and pulpit preparation—Opinion of Rev. Dr. Baird—Practice of President Davies—Provides adequate security against false teachers—Does not deprive the churches of resident pastors and teachers—Past usefulness—Adapted to a crowded, as well as a sparse, population.

It is objected that frequent change interferes with the pastor's opportunities for study, and thus influences unfavorably his qualifications for usefulness. There are two sides to this question. Each system has its advantages and its disadvantages. The settled minister will be hard pressed for sermons. It is often matter of complaint that the studies, by which a preparation for entering upon the duties of the pastor is acquired, are laid aside after those

duties are commenced. On the other hand, the Methodist itinerant may gain opportunities for pursuing any particular branch of study which he may deem important. He can, if necessary, repreach his sermons. They will be as fresh to his new hearers as if prepared expressly for the occasion of their delivery. The Rev. Dr. Baird, in his recently published work on "Religion in America," speaks of this privilege as a very great advantage. He remarks: "But the grand advantage possessed by the Methodist itinerant preacher, and one which, if he has any talent at all, he cannot fail to profit by, is, that he may preach sooner or later in many or all of the eight, ten, or more, places in his circuit, the discourse with which he sets out, and which he has been preparing during the intervals of repose which he enjoys. This frequent repetition of the same sermon is an inestimable means of improvement. Each repetition admits of some modification, as the discourse is not written out, and enables the preacher to improve what is faulty, and to supply what seemed deficient in

the preceding effort. No men accordingly, with us, become readier or more effective speakers."

The Rev. Albert Barnes, in his "Introductory Essay on the Life and Times of President Davies," quotes with approbation the following: "Mr. Davies wrote and prepared his sermons with great care; this he was enabled to do, notwithstanding the great and multiplied pastoral duties which he had to perform, from the fact that he had so many places of preaching, and that they were so wide apart, that one sermon could be preached through his extensive range without much danger of any of his hearers having heard the same sermon twice. His common practice was to take his manuscripts with him into the pulpit, and make more or less use of them in delivering his discourses. But his memory was such, and the frequent use he was permitted to make of the same sermon rendered it so familiar, that he was never trammeled in his delivery." In consequence of this one privilege, many Methodist preachers have risen from small

beginnings to respectability, if not eminence, in general information, classical attainments, and usefulness; while, from the want of it, many educated men have come down to a level with the uneducated.

Dr. Porter claims in favor of a settled ministry that the churches are "not distracted with various schemes and contradictory statements of doctrine, but are trained under the same scheme, in the apprehension of which they are built up in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Whether this uniformity be so great an advantage or not, will, of course, depend upon the correctness of the doctrines taught. It is possible that a change in the scheme of doctrinal instruction might be of service. Some of the advocates of a settled ministry have thought so in some instances. Nor is a permanent union between one pastor and one church security against distracting changes. Ministers change. And I may venture to suggest that churches have as

often been distracted from this cause as the other.

Mr. Tyler further objects that "it takes from the brethren the right of choosing their religious teachers; on which right, more than any other, the church depends for defense against false and incompetent teachers." I shall postpone the question of the alledged *right* of the brethren, until I have done with the practical working of the system. I shall now examine the charge that it deprives the church of the chief "implement of defense against false and incompetent teachers." That Congregational and Presbyterian churches are greatly dependent upon this privilege, for security against the specified evil, I grant. Take it from them, and they would be in a wholly defenseless condition. They have no supervision over the education or licensure of candidates. And if those who are introduced into the ministry without their consent, might also be made their pastors without their consent, they would have just cause for apprehension. But

the structure of Methodism provides securities peculiar to itself, and they are not less effective than those which characterize any other system.

For, besides the fact already stated, namely, that no man can become eligible to the pastoral office until he has passed several times under the review of the church of which he is a member, being first recommended by the leaders' meeting for license to exhort merely—then recommended by the same body to the quarterly meeting conference for license as a local preacher—then licensed by the vote of a majority of the quarterly meeting conference—then recommended by the latter body to the annual conference as an itinerant—when admitted into the itinerancy securities of a new description begin to operate. These are found, partly in the integrity of the ministry as a body, and partly in their interests. Should he prove incompetent to teach, or should he teach false doctrines, a complaint may be preferred against him. His case will come by a regular process before the annual

conference. And if other motives might be deemed insufficient to secure the protection of the churches from the mischief which his ministry inflicts, the interests of the whole conference are deeply implicated in the case. Some member of the body ecclesiastical must succeed him, and meet the difficulties which he has engendered. Were the minister a Congregationalist, and the church Congregational, no one would be obliged to take his place. If the interests of the church were deeply wounded, and its strength greatly impaired, the ministers might wag their heads at it, and suffer it to go down. Not so a Methodist church and Methodist ministers. The damage must be repaired, or endured by the ministry as well as by the church. Each member of the conference is bound, by the terms of the ministerial compact, to hold himself in readiness to go there, it may be to labor and suffer to the extent of his capabilities, and see but little desirable fruit.

The author of the Catechism further objects that "it deprives the churches of

resident pastors and teachers, contrary to primitive practice, and to the highest advancement of the members in Christian knowledge and experience."

In what way does it deprive the churches of resident pastors and teachers? Our itinerant preachers sustain the relation of pastors and teachers as much as do the settled ministers of other denominations. And I have shown that our system has this very great advantage over the one with which it is compared—that it keeps the churches constantly supplied with pastors. They are not liable to either the temporary or permanent destitutions which occur in connection with the other system. Nor can it be said that our pastors are not resident with their charge. I cannot but think that the worthy author was at a loss for material out of which to form an objection when he penned this. And how he could fall into such a misapprehension of facts is to me unaccountable.

Mr. Tyler proposes the question: "Has not the Methodist *itinerant* system been productive of great good?" and answers

it as follows: "Undoubtedly that feature of the Methodist economy has conduced much to its rapid growth and advancement. But it seems to be adapted to the early operations of a new sect, rather than to the highest edification and improvement of the people. This requires a permanent ministry." To this I reply, that this system has been in operation in England for a century, and for nearly a century in this country, and we do not find in it as yet any want of adaptation to the great work of the Christian ministry. It loses nothing of its efficacy by age. The Methodists, in both countries, outstrip all other sects in their career of usefulness, notwithstanding their competitors in the noble strife have been so much longer in the field.

That our itinerancy is specially adapted to new countries and a sparse population is obvious. It is no less adapted to older countries, and a crowded population. It is not an uncommon thing to find neighborhoods contiguous to the great cities as destitute of religious means and influence

as the most distant and isolated portions of the country, and far more vicious, on account of their ready access to those facilities for vice which cities afford. These places are not likely to be supplied on the plan of a settled ministry. The whole population of each place might be unable to support a minister, and, if able, they would not be likely to call one. They must first be sought out and made, by patient instruction, to appreciate the gospel. The first preachers, if faithful, will be far more likely to meet with persecution than a liberal support. Now the tendency of a settled ministry is not to such places. They crowd into large cities. The greater the population, the greater the probability of a large church, and a competent support. Our plan enables us to take all these places into circuits, and to supply them with regular preaching and pastoral supervision.

The greatest difficulties of the itinerancy are found in new and thinly settled countries. The conferences, districts, and circuits, must be spread over a wider territory. The stations must be at a greater

distance from each other. The toil and inconvenience of removals are so much the greater, and also of continued traveling around districts and circuits. To one who has any understanding of the philosophy of Methodism, it must be at once apparent, that every new city or village which springs up operates in our favor, by bringing our churches into close contiguity. Every new road opened, every old one repaired, every turnpike, every canal, every foot of railroad, every new steamboat, every bridge, is so much added to our facilities. It is as if the whole community were at work to cast up a highway for us. Our ends are answered just as much as if the money were subscribed and the work done by us, or by others for our special benefit. The friction of our ecclesiastical machinery is continually diminishing.

And what is thus working to our advantage, is operating against the other system. Parishes are no longer secluded. They are constantly visited by strangers. The people will hear new voices, and be captivated by novelty. The settled minis-

ter will have to work hard to retain the preferences of his hearers. They will travel more, hear a greater variety of ministers abroad, and thus widen the field of comparison. The minister himself, if he is not quite satisfied, can take a trip of several hundreds of miles; give specimens of his eloquence to several different congregations in the course of a week or two; and thus open the way for a call.

CHAPTER XVII.

Unfounded comparison between Congregational and Presbyterian evangelists and missionaries, and the itinerant ministers of the M. E. Church—*Concio ad Clerum* of Rev. A. Newton—The operations of evangelists and missionaries incongruous with the interests of a settled ministry.

LEST it should be supposed that our system has in any respect the advantage of Congregationalism, Mr. Tyler adds: "And it should also be recollected, in instituting a comparison between the Congregational and Methodist systems, that the employment of traveling preachers,

although reduced to a system and carried to a great extent by the Methodists, is not unknown to Congregationalism. Evangelists and missionaries are not confined to the care of a single church; and it would be in perfect keeping with Congregational order to supply new and thinly inhabited regions with an itinerant ministry." He would persuade his readers that Congregationalism unites, or may unite, all the advantages of the itinerant system of the Methodists with the superior advantages of a settled ministry.

That Congregationalists employ evangelists and missionaries, we admit; but their missionary operations are a mere appendage to Congregational order. Let the missionary be called and settled; in other words, let him become a pastor, according to their theory of constituting pastors; and he ceases to be a missionary. He belongs to the settled ministry. His church may receive aid from the funds of the Missionary Society, but that does not make him a missionary. Otherwise a great portion of the settled ministers of Connecticut are

missionaries. But if he is not called and settled by the people to whom he ministers, upon whose authority does he go?

He is appointed by the official board of the Missionary Society, and subject to its control. Mr. Tyler says: "Evangelists and missionaries are not confined to the care of a single church." Is this designed to imply that they have *pastoral* care? It cannot be pretended that evangelists have. Nor can missionaries, except in violation of the principles of Congregationalism in reference to the source of pastoral authority.

I should like to be informed how Congregationalists could, consistently with their order, supply "new and thinly inhabited regions with an itinerant ministry." A writer in the New-Englander, vol. i, page 131, proposes, "as the true remedy for a surplusage of ministers in certain districts, to send forth to other regions all who are properly qualified, and to put them to work, and keep them at work, where their labors will be effectual for the advancement of the kingdom of God." Perhaps this is the

scheme. I am glad to see this recognition of the sending principle.

But how will this sending comport with the alledged right of the people to elect their teachers, and the teachers their people? It is apparent that, to remedy the difficulty complained of, it is necessary for them to depart altogether from their boasted theory; and the alternative to be adopted is one which would never be submitted to by the equalizing and free spirit of Methodism.

But Congregationalism has not the power, whether legitimate or otherwise, to send its surplusage of ministers from one region to another. The theological schools may send forth hundreds every year; the associations may license them, and thus render them eligible to the pastoral work; but there is no authority which can require them to go anywhere. If necessity, or the spirit of their holy calling, should induce them to place themselves under the direction and control of the American Home Missionary Society, still the power necessary to keep them employed where

their labors are in demand does not exist. They can withdraw themselves from the service of that society, and crowd the market in New-England, leaving vast numbers of churches in hopeless destitution. It is true, a Methodist minister may withdraw himself from the field assigned him, but in so doing he relinquishes his eligibility to the pastoral relation.

In reference to evangelists, it is the opinion of many Congregationalists and Presbyterians that their office (if office they can be said to have) is quite incongruous with that of a settled ministry. Among the papers which I have preserved, since the attacks of Congregationalists on Methodism aroused me to this investigation, are extensive extracts from the "*Concio ad Clerum*," preached by Rev. A. Newton, at a late commencement of the Western Reserve College, on the subject of the employment in the churches of a class of men called evangelists. It was published in the Ohio Observer by request of the ministers who heard it. The extracts are found in the New-England Puritan, for

Sept. 23, 1841, the editor of which remarks: "The publication of such a sermon among the churches at the west is a token for good." I ask attention to the following passages:—

"Another evil of the system is its unhappy effect upon the pastoral relation.

"It is a fact, which I think will not be questioned, that where evangelists have labored most, there the pastoral relation has been most precarious. A few years ago it was almost a matter of course, in some portions of the country, that the dismissions of the pastor followed the labors of the evangelist. And those churches which have adopted this system have been unable, in general, to retain a pastor above two or three years. There are, or have been, large sections of the Presbyterian Church, where a permanent ministry is among the things that were—whole presbyteries exist with scarcely one installed pastor within their bounds. These very sections have been the theatre of the new system of operations. So uniformly has the one state of things followed the other, that we must be-

lieve they sustain to each the relation of cause and effect, or else renounce one of the first maxims of sound reasoning.

"But can we not see, in the nature of the cause itself, that which would lead us to expect just such effects. Is there not enough in the novel, eccentric, theatrical, story-telling style of preaching, which is sedulously cultivated by many evangelists, to make many people think that is the best way of preaching, and almost the only way to do good? Is it not easy to conceive that a large portion of almost every congregation may be so captivated, at first, with it, that they would be dissatisfied with any other? Why, the Bible itself becomes a stale book to minds accustomed to such preaching. The burning eloquence of Paul, even, has nothing to excite them. What wonder, then, is it, that they grow tired of their pastor, whose voice they have heard for a score of years, even though he may preach with the zeal and fervor of an apostle!

"But there is another way in which this system affects the pastoral relation. Most evangelists deem themselves more com-

petent than the pastor, not only to preach, but to manage the whole revival. They know just how many meetings, and at what time they should be held, better than he who has been on the ground twenty years. They therefore insist on having the sole direction; and if the pastor attempts to resist the usurpation of his rights, he does it at the peril of exciting against him, not only the opposition of the evangelist, but all whom he can enlist in his behalf. Thus the foundation is speedily laid of disaffection between himself and his people, and of ultimate separation. How many dismissions have resulted from this cause alone, let the history of past years decide. What division, discord, and every evil work, have been connected with these movements, let those churches testify which have been brought to the very verge of ruin by them."

So much for Mr. Tyler's attempt to make it appear that the operations of an intinerant system may be harmoniously united with the Congregational plan of a settled ministry.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Methodism does not deprive its churches of any right by its mode of supplying them with pastors.

Mr. Tyler objects, as we have seen, that the Methodist system "takes from the brethren the right of choosing their religious teachers."

There is a vagueness in the phraseology of this objection, which makes it important that we should ascertain definitely its import.

In the first part, the objector cannot be understood to mean that our system interferes with the right of members of other denominations to choose their teachers; or, secondly, that it denies to any the right to join whatever denomination they may desire to join. Methodists become and continue such of their free choice. If any become dissatisfied with Methodism, or Methodist preachers, the wide field of Christendom is before them, and there is no restraint upon their liberty. If he mean to be understood that the Methodist laity

have nothing to say in determining who shall be elevated to the pastoral office, the objection has already been refuted. But he means nothing more, it is presumed, than that particular churches or congregations among the Methodists are deprived of their right to elect their immediate pastors. The objection is refuted by the single fact, that the right alledged never existed. With us, churches have no more right to elect their pastors, than pastors their churches. We readily grant that the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, and others, have this right. It is conceded, or rather *created*, by the constitutions of their churches. It is one of the terms of the ecclesiastical compact into which they have entered. But no such right is acquired by becoming a Methodist. It is not in the compact. On the contrary, a connection with the Methodist Episcopal Church implies an agreement that the ministry shall be otherwise appointed.

Perhaps it will be affirmed that such a compact is vicious—that it nullifies a right conferred by a higher charter, the New

Testament. Can any one prove this? Where is the text? Let it be adduced, and the argument is at an end.

Will it be replied that, although no statutory clause can be found, primitive practice determines the question? We are willing to abide the result of this issue. Bring forward, then, from the New Testament, a single instance of a church electing its immediate pastor. I have looked in vain for one.

My impression is, that a thorough examination of the sacred oracles, in search of examples of ministers receiving calls to particular charges, and entering into stipulations for their support, would lead to some mortifying discoveries. I confess that I have met with one instance in the Old Testament. I refer to the case of the Levite, recorded in Judges, chapter xvii: He "departed out of the city from Bethlehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place." In other words, he was traveling as a candidate for a settlement. "And he came to Mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah." This Micah "had a house of

gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest." "And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals." The Levite accepted the call. "And Micah consecrated him, and he became his priest." Some time after this he received another call. Certain Danites said unto him, "Go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe, and a family in Israel?" This reasoning was decisive. He was not at all averse to promotion. His "heart was glad." He took the image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, belonging to Micah, and went off to serve his new congregation.

It is by no means my intention to give this Levite as the prototype of the settled ministry. In its ranks Christianity finds many of her brightest ornaments. I cite it as the only instance which I can find in

the sacred oracles of a minister accepting a call to a particular charge, and of mutual contracting between him and his charge, for services on the one hand, and support on the other.

So far as the New Testament is concerned, every example, to my view, looks the other way. The Saviour sent forth his disciples two and two, assigning them their field of labor. The apostles refused to be detained in any place by the most urgent solicitation; but, regarding all the churches as their joint pastoral care, went here and there, as the Holy Ghost, or a sense of duty, moved them. Paul sent Titus, and another not named, but of whom it is said, "His praise is in all the churches," to Corinth. Subsequently, he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, with instructions to include Corinth in their field of labor. He sent Tychicus to Ephesus. He sent Epaphroditus to the Philippian Church, and expressed a hope that he would shortly be able to send Timothy unto them.

Perhaps we shall be told that the

churches of the New Testament elected their own officers. This is a debatable proposition. I hesitate not to deny it. But if it should be granted that they elected other officers, the proof that they elected their pastors would still be lacking, and this is, at present, the sole point in dispute.

It may be thought, however, that, if it should be admitted that these churches elected any of their officers, a very strong presumption would arise that they elected all their officers, including, of course, their pastor. We think otherwise. Were a foreigner, speculating upon the theory and practice of American republicanism, to infer that all the officers of our government are elected by popular suffrage, from the fact that some are, his inference would be contradicted by facts notorious to every intelligent American.

Failing to establish this alledged right of churches to elect their pastors, either by the precept or practice of the New Testament, some may be disposed to fall upon the pretence that it is a natural right. A

single reflection will expose the absurdity of this view. Natural rights belong to men as men, and not as Methodists or Presbyterians. And to say that natural rights may be acquired by joining any association would be to perpetrate a gross solecism. It would be to destroy the very distinction between natural and conventional rights upon which the supposed argument of the objector is based. But who will affirm that men have a right, as men—apart from their religious character, or without membership in any church, and independently of any other conventional privilege—to say what particular minister shall be the pastor of this or that congregation? No one, it is presumed. The result is, that Methodism deprives no one of his rights by its mode of supplying its churches with pastors.

THE END.

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